

Congress of the United States

NEWSLETTER NO. 191

House of Representatives

April 8, 1957

Washington, D. C.

Dear Friend:

The Indians had a device for punishing prisoners or tribal offenders which was known as running the gantlet. The one to be punished was required to pass between two lines formed by the men and women of the tribe and he was beaten unmercifully with switches, clubs, whips or some other pain-inflicting instrument as he ran through. I was reminded of this form of punishment last week as I watched Congressman John Fogarty of Rhode Island try to maneuver his appropriations bill past the members of the economy bloc who were taking swipes at it. Fogarty is Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee which has jurisdiction over the funds for the Department of Labor and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. As chairman, he has the task of shepherding the appropriations bill through the House, a difficult task at best, but especially formidable at this time, for this is no ordinary year. This is the year of the largest peace-time budget in the history of our nation and the House is determined to beat it down to ordinary size, if it can.

Most congressmen will agree that no one in the Congress knows as much about these Departments as does Fogarty. When he makes his annual visit to the floor to explain his bill, members listen with rapt attention and admiration while he traces the progress which has been made in research against the killing and crippling diseases such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, heart disease, TB and the rest. There has always been a feeling that if Fogarty said the money was needed, it was needed, and those who dared to try to hack a few dollars away from Fogarty's programs were indignantly rebuffed.

But this time it was different. Even though the members liked John as much as ever, even though this was Fogarty's bill, it still represented a portion of the President's controversial \$72 billion budget, and was therefore vulnerable. It made little difference that the Appropriations Committee had already stricken \$119 million from the \$2.9 billion bill. It made little difference that the President at long last had taken a firm stand in support of his budget. The spark for retrenchment struck by the President's own Secretary of the Treasury and fanned by the volume of constituent mail, had taken flame and was now almost as unquenchable as a windswept prairie fire. When Fogarty's bill came to the floor, the gantlet had already been formed by members with amendments designed to whip a piece from the bill and others who supported them in the name of economy.

Amendment followed amendment. The Office of the Secretary of Labor, his Solicitor, the Bureau of Veterans Compensation, of Labor Statistics, the Women's Bureau, the Wage and Hour Division, the Food and Drug Administration, the Public Health Service -- all in quick succession suffered reductions, some large, some small. Time and again Fogarty took the floor seeking to turn the tide, but even he was voted down. As one member put it, "if the Ten Commandments were in that appropriations bill, an amendment would be offered to cut them to seven -- and it would probably pass!" It was only when the amendment taking \$1,300,000 from the Food and Drug Administration was approved by a vote of 73-72 that the House paused, shook itself and decided to be more selective.

On Thursday, after two weeks of thrashing, the debate was ended and the House was poised to call the roll. Four minor amendments were accepted by voice vote. Then the roll calls began, 14 of them, a new record, for never before in the history of the Congress had the House voted so many times in one day. Members who had voted easily for economy by voice votes in the Committee of the Whole, changed their minds on the roll calls, and funds were restored for many of the agencies which had suffered slashes only a few days earlier. The Food and Drug Administration was among these, as was the Women's Bureau. The vote to cut \$50 million from the Public Health Service program for grants in aid for local sanitation facilities and the elimination of water pollution was reversed. At 6:30 that night when the final vote was taken, the House had trimmed the bill in a number of instances, but Fogarty was satisfied. It was clear that he had come through the gantlet with his appropriations bill somewhat bloodied but in the main unbroken.

Fogarty might have described his experience in the same way as did Mr. Jones in a story told by Abraham Lincoln. Jones was a rather meek person and had the reputation of being badly henpecked. One day, when his wife was seen switching him out of the house, a friend of his met him on the street and said: "Jones, I've always stood up for you, but I refuse to do it any longer. Any man who quietly takes a switching from his wife deserves to be horsewhipped." Jones smiled and patted his friend on the back. "Don't be offended," he said. "Why, it hurt me hardly at all -- and you've no idea what a powerful lot of good it did for my wife!"

Your friend,

SIDNEY R. YATES
Member of Congress